



NEWSLETTER

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY



SDDVA PARTICIPATES IN VA2K

Today was a great day to be outside! SDDVA's Sioux Falls Claims Office staff participated in the 9th annual Sioux Fall's VA2K Walk and Roll.

The walk is conducted nationwide and encourages healthy activity while allowing participants to support homeless veterans with donated items.

The Sioux Falls VA event is one of about 170 VA2K events at VA facilities across the country. It's not just about exercise, it also focuses on helping homeless veterans. Participants were encouraged to bring donations of items



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such as pre-packaged food, bottled water or toiletries, all of which will be donated to homeless veterans in local areas. Donations are encouraged, but are not required to participate.

KUDOs to the Sioux Falls SDDVA team for their outstanding donations for the cause.



WW II VETERANS HONORED

Over 65 World War II Veterans from Western South Dakota attended the 6th annual WWII Luncheon in Rapid City, this week. The luncheon, a tribute to our “greatest generation,” was hosted by Bill Casper with over 250 in attendance.

Attendees were welcomed by Rapid City Mayor Steve Allender. Allender awarded six WWII Veterans with certificates of recognition and a special Purple Heart coin.

SDNG Army Chief of Staff, Brigadier General Marshall Michaels was one of the keynote speakers. He shared the history of the SDNG’s service during WWII. He noted the 147 Field Artillery Unit saw action in Pearl Harbor, the Philippines, and Australia. He told attendees of the 76 SDNG members who died in service to their state and country. Michels ended his remarks by presenting Bill Casper with a special SDNG leadership coin.



Former Army Air Corps B-17 pilot, Chuck Childs, a member of the 25th Air Force, spoke of the Army Air Corps contributions to the war effort and provided an array of statistical information that really brought home the enormous impact that air power had on both fronts of WW II. Childs presented

Bill Casper with a commemorative plaque from all the WWII Veterans thanking him for all he does for them.

A very moving thanksgiving ceremony took place for Army combat nurse Marcella Le Beau. Her WWII service took her to England, France, and Belgium while tending to the wounded. In a touching moment, former military and VA Chaplain, Herb Cleveland, recited a prayer that Marcella used frequently to give herself perspective while serving in the war-torn European theater. On a side note, Marcella humorously claims that she is not a combat nurse as she never fired a gun!!!! We are sure the heroes whose lives she saved, would beg to differ!

“All in all, it was a great opportunity for WWII Veterans to reconnect, share in the special fact that they truly are our “greatest generation” and to be recognized as such,” said SDDVA Field Officer Will Huffmon.



VA HOME LOAN GUARANTY PROGRAM LOAN FEE WAIVERS

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced May 13 that veterans who qualify for a [VA Home Loan funding fee](#) waiver are now being notified in their [home loan eligibility certificate](#) and disability compensation award letter.

The recent change to the [Home Loan Guaranty program](#) aims to improve benefits delivery to veteran homebuyers.

“Through an internal quality improvement effort, the VA has put a plan in place to better inform veterans through key communications when the law allows the VA to waive the fee for a veteran,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie.

The VA also modified the “home loan welcome” letter to make sure veterans know they may qualify for a loan fee waiver, should they later obtain a VA disability compensation award.

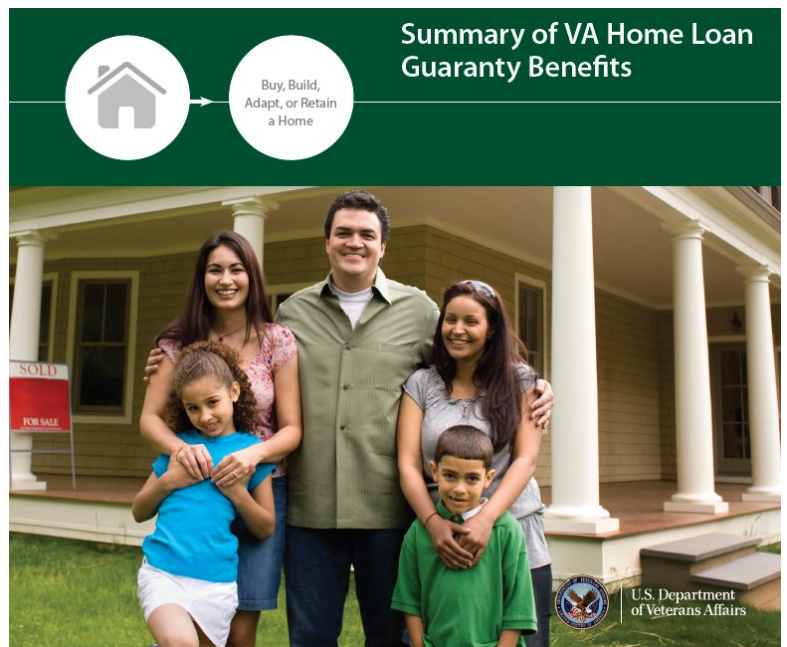
Historically, the VA tasked lenders with verifying the “exempt” status of veteran homebuyers and the department would identify waiver cases using its own internal loan audit process or by relying on veterans contacting the VA directly. Further internal procedural changes will provide a more regular review of program data and the VA will soon issue policy and procedural changes to ensure a veteran’s up-to-date status for the fee waiver is correctly identified.

A major issue under review is how the VA credits borrowers who, after loan closing, were awarded disability compensation with retroactive effective dates. The department is working to determine how far the VA can go to provide relief, given the current restrictions of applicable laws.

The VA’s ongoing quality review looked at millions of loans dating back to 1998 originations. Since the initiative is ongoing, the VA has not totaled how many borrowers might be helped by the new efforts. The VA notes that it routinely returns funding fees when appropriate. Since 2014, the department has provided an average total of \$75-\$100 million to roughly 5,000 veterans each year.

More information about the VA funding fees and refunds is available in [VA’s Lenders Handbook](#). Veterans who think they may be eligible for a refund should visit VA’s website at:

https://www.benefits.va.gov/homeloans/purchaseco_loan_fee.asp.



ROUNDS, COLLEAGUES REINTRODUCE BLUE WATER NAVY LEGISLATION

U.S. Sen. Mike Rounds, a member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, joined a number of senators to reintroduce the *Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act* this Congress. The bipartisan legislation would make sure thousands of "Blue Water" Navy veterans can receive the disability and health care benefits they earned after their exposure to the dangerous pesticide Agent Orange while fighting in the Vietnam War.

"Our veterans have made incredible sacrifices to defend our freedom and keep us safe," said Rounds. "We owe it to them to take proper care of them after their service is complete, especially when it comes to injuries and health problems that resulted from active duty. Our legislation would extend eligibility for disability compensation and health care to 'Blue Water' Navy veterans who were exposed to dioxin, a chemical linked to significant health problems, during the Vietnam War. This legislation is long overdue and I look forward to working to advance it as a member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee."

During the Vietnam War, the U.S. military sprayed approximately 20 million gallons of Agent Orange in Vietnam to remove jungle foliage. This toxic chemical had devastating health effects on millions serving in Vietnam. In 1991, Congress passed a law requiring the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to provide presumptive coverage to Vietnam veterans with illnesses that the Institute of Medicine has directly linked

to Agent Orange exposure. However, in 2002, the VA decided that it would only cover veterans who could prove that they had orders for "boots on the ground" during the Vietnam War. This exclusion prevents thousands of sailors from receiving benefits even though they had significant Agent Orange exposure from drinking and bathing in contaminated water just offshore.





VABHHCS FACILITIES WILL BE TOBACCO FREE

As part of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) commitment to provide excellent health care for veterans, VA Black Hills Health Care System (VABHHCS) is pleased to announce that all its facilities will be tobacco free for visitors, contractors, volunteers, vendors and patients, by May 29, 2019. Department of Veterans Health Administration (VHA) published VHA Directive 1085 Smoke-Free Policy for patients, visitors, contractors, volunteers, and vendors at VA Health Care Facilities on March 5, 2019 outlining the plan for VHA facilities.

"The change in policy is consistent with our mission to promote personal wellness and provide a healthy environment for patients, visitors and employees", said Sandra Horsman, Director, VA BHHCS. "We are sharing information about this change through letters, print materials, social media, and our website along with our providers speaking directly with patients who use tobacco". VABHHCS has several evidence-based and supportive tools and resources for veterans who would like to quit tobacco use to improve their health.

VABHHCS is not alone in recognizing the importance of creating a tobacco-free campus. As of 2014, 4,000 health care facilities and four national health care systems in the U.S. have implemented smoke-free grounds, to include many VHA health care facilities.

Valuable resources for veterans include:

- <https://smokefree.gov/vet>
- <https://www.veteranshealthlibrary.org/>
- VA Tobacco Quitline – 1-855-QUIT-VET (1-855-784-8838)
- Break Free from Tobacco Groups
- Home Telehealth for Tobacco Cessation
- Individual Tobacco Cessation Counseling

For more information about any of VABHHCS resources please call Guy Ferguson at 605-720- 7499 or Kelly Tobin at 605-720-7252.



SIoux FALLS AIR SHOW

Mark your calendars—August 17-18, 2019—the Sioux Falls Air Show. For two days you can experience the sights and sounds of some of the fastest military jets in the world.

Go back in time as you can also see some of the first military planes that were utilized. For more details visit: <https://www.siouxfallsairshow.com/>.



VA AND VIRTA HEALTH PARTNER IN INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO DIABETES CARE

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced a partnership with [Virta Health](#) to explore an innovative program focused on improving the health of persons with type 2 diabetes.

In effect since March 22, the agreement will give 400 veterans the opportunity to participate in the [Virta Treatment](#), which can help individuals safely and sustainably achieve glycemic control while reducing use of medications.

This diabetes care will be provided for up to one year at no cost to VA or veteran participants.

“Partnering with community providers facilitates a more comprehensive approach to care,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “Many veterans have type 2 diabetes, and it is strongly linked to obesity, so we are excited to explore Virta Health’s approach to tackling this debilitating and costly condition.”

Currently, the VA offers medical care, education, counseling, weight loss programs and blood glucose monitoring for more than 1.5 million veterans with type 2 diabetes. This partnership provides a small group of veterans access to Virta’s proprietary, individualized, low-carbohydrate nutrition protocols on a 24/7 continuous remote care platform from medical providers and health coaches, an approach currently not widely in use at the VA.

Virta Health, a licensed medical provider in all 50 states, focuses on treating type 2 diabetes through noninvasive means. Their services, available 24/7, include personalized nutrition, peer support, health coaching and physician monitoring, all delivered remotely.

This partnership exemplifies the work of the [VHA Office of Community Engagement \(OCE\)](#), which supports and develops community and corporate partnerships to benefit veterans. For information regarding developing a nonmonetary partnership with VHA, contact OCE at <https://www.va.gov/healthpartnerships/>.

Veterans interested in the program should visit www.virtahealth.com/veterans. For more information about VA health care, visit www.va.gov/health.



The Sioux Falls Vet Center will be hosting a 40th Anniversary Open House on Wednesday—June 12th from 3:00 -5:00 pm (CT). The open house will be held at 3200 W. 49th Street in Sioux Falls.

Des Moines, Iowa

Brighton, Massachusetts

Walkathon: participants pose in front of the Honolulu Vet Center.

"Keeping The Promise"

Vet 40th Center ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

40 Years of Keeping the Promise

June 12th, 3pm to 5pm
Sioux Falls Vet Center
3200 West 49th Street 57106
For more information, contact:
Doug McCuddin (605) 330-4552

History of Vet Centers



Founding and Establishment

1979: Vet Centers were established by Congress, and signed into law, on June 13, 1979 out of the recognition that a significant number of Vietnam combat and era Veterans were not accessing VA services at the same levels as Korean and World War II Veterans.

Public Law 96-22 amended Title 38 USC to establish authority for VA to provide readjustment counseling as a new category of service. The role of this new service was to assist Vietnam Veterans and their families in making the transition from traumatic war-time experiences to civilian life within their home communities.

The Congressional intent regarding the nature of readjustment counseling included the following basic features:

- Readjustment counseling is a non-medical/non-diagnosis counseling service provided through community-based Vet Centers located outside the larger VA medical system.
- Vet Centers will decrease as many barriers to care such as building trust by hiring fellow combat Veterans.
- Counseling, outreach and referral is provided in a comfortable, confidential and professional atmosphere that engages the Veteran client as a partner in the development of the counseling plan.

In response to the new law, VA implemented "Operation Outreach" to administer 87 temporary, community-based Vet Centers.

Establishing Permanency

1981: Due to high utilization of the Vet Centers by Vietnam Veterans, Congress passed legislation, extending the life of the program through September 1984.

1983: The program's temporary, two-year status was eliminated, and readjustment counseling was established as a life-time entitlement for eligible Veterans.

Expanding Vet Centers, Services and Eligibility

1991: In the wake of Operation Desert Storm and Operation Desert Shield, Congress passed legislation in April 1991 extending Vet Center readjustment counseling eligibility to all post-Vietnam Veterans who served in a combat theater of operations.

1992: Vet Centers received authorization to provide counseling to any Veteran reporting sexual assault and/or harassment while serving on active military duty during any period or in any area of service.

1996: Congress expanded eligibility for Vet Center readjustment counseling services to any Veteran who served in the military in a theater of combat operations during any period of war, such as World War II and Korea, or in any other area during a period in which hostilities occurred.

2003: VA Secretary authorized Vet Centers to provide bereavement counseling services to surviving parents, spouses, children and siblings of service members who have died while on active duty, to include federally activated Reserve and National Guard personnel.

2004: Outreach specialist positions were created by hiring combat Veterans to create face to face connections with other Veterans to improve awareness and access to care. By the end of 2004, more than 900 employees staffed 206 Vet Centers.

2008: To ensure access to readjustment counseling for new generations of combat Veterans returning from active service in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs authorized 90 new Vet Centers 50 Mobile Vet Centers (MVCs).

2009: The first Mobile Vet Center hit the road, expanding services into other, and often more remote, communities.

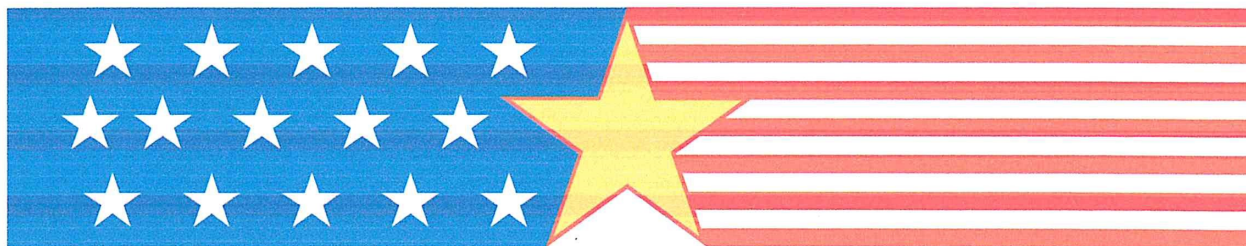
2010: Eligibility expanded to include active duty service members who met other eligibility criteria.

2011: A 24/7 Vet Center Call Center was operational and ready to accept calls, assisting Veterans, family members and stakeholders.

2013: The National Defense Authorization Act extended eligibility to those who provided direct emergent medical care or mortuary services while serving on active duty or served as a member of an unmanned aerial vehicle crew that provided direct support to operations in a combat zone or area of hostility. The law also mandated the organizational realignment of the Readjustment Counseling Service (RCS) as a separate and distinct organization within the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), with separate funding in the annual President's Budget submission, and under the direct line authority to the Under Secretary for Health.

2014: The Veterans Access, Choice, & Accountability Act amended authority to provide counseling services to active duty personnel who experience sexual assault/harassment while in the military.

Today: Confidential readjustment counseling services are provided at 300 Vet Centers, 80 mobile Vet Centers, numerous outstations and community access points as well as 24/7 through the Vet Center Call Center. More than 2,000 staff are ready to assist eligible Veterans, active duty service members and their families with a wide range of services, ranging from socioeconomic concerns to dealing with the trauma associated with war, sexual assault and psychological injury.



Tribute to Freedom Honoring Our Veterans

Eureka Sports Complex

June 15, 2019



Festivities Include:

Opening Program:
(Keynote Speaker
VJ Smith) - 10:30 am

Inflatables for Kids
After Opening Program

Free Meal for All:
12 noon-1:30 pm

USO Show: 2 pm-3:30 pm

Parade: 3:30 pm
(Route to be determined)



VETERANS STORY PROJECT

South Dakota State University Veterans Affairs and the South Dakota Humanities Council are sponsoring a new veterans storytelling contest — called the Veterans Story Project — that will culminate with an awards ceremony at the South Dakota Festival of Books Oct. 4-6 in Deadwood. While similar to the Veterans Writing Prize program conducted by SDHC in 2016 and 2017, the 2019 contest features a new partnership with SDSU and a dual submission format allowing participants to submit 3-5 minute oral stories recorded on video or written stories of up to 1,500 words (past contests accepted written submissions only). Submissions will be accepted from May 10-August 15 for the Veterans Story Project, which is open to veterans or current service members of any branch of the United States military currently living in South Dakota.

Submissions should consist of new, unpublished material addressing the military experience, such as recovery or lessons learned. Individuals may submit either a three- to five-minute video or up to 1,500 written words in any format — poetry, prose, fiction, creative nonfiction, etc. Entries will be judged on content, not the production quality of videos or the technical quality of written content.

"There are many benefits for veterans to share their story through creative writing or any other humanities driven experience that can encourage healing, release or support others," said Connie Johnson, coordinator for Veterans Affairs at SDSU. Johnson is also the lone female Purple Heart recipient in North and South Dakota.

Three finalists in each category, written and video, will be invited to the South Dakota Festival of Books in Deadwood for a reading/showing of their work by U.S. Army veteran and author Brian Turner, who will announce the winners and hold a workshop specifically for veterans. Turner is one of many award-winning veteran authors who have appeared at the Festival of Books, which in the past has featured National Book Award winner Tim O'Brien and Pulitzer Prize winner Robert Olen Butler.

The South Dakota Humanities Council, a statewide humanities organization that hosts the annual Festival, will work with the finalists to support their attendance at the Festival Oct. 5 in Deadwood. Writers do not need to attend the festival to submit work. A representative can read the author's work on the finalist's behalf.

Each category winner receives a cash prize of \$500, second, \$300; and third, \$200. In addition, every veteran who submits a story receives one free ticket to Turner's writing workshop Oct. 4 in Deadwood. Stories should be submitted to:

Connie Johnson
Coordinator for Veterans Affairs
South Dakota State University
Brown Hall Room 134
Brookings, SD 57007

For more information or questions, contact Johnson at connie.johnson@sdstate.edu or (605) 688-4700.

UPCOMING EVENTS

May 16—SFVAHCS Women's Health Clinic Open House—First Floor of Medical Center—4:30 pm (CT)
May 16—VABHHCS Veterans Orientation Program (Room 133) Rapid City CBOC—4:30 pm (MT)
May 17—Veterans Honor Concert—State Veterans Home—Hot Springs—2:00 pm (MT)
May 17-19—DAV Convention—Hilton Garden Inn (5300 S. Grand Circle) —Sioux Falls
May 18—SFVAHCS Whole Health Class—Sioux Falls Vet Center (3200 W. 49th Street) - 9:00 am—11:00 am (CT)
May 27—MJFSVH Memorial Day Car Show—Hot Springs—9:00 am (MT)
Jun 6—SFVAHCS 2nd Annual VA Baby Shower—DAV (1519 W. 51st Street) - Sioux Falls—6:00 pm (CT)
Jun 6-9—American Legion State Convention—Sioux Falls Convention Center
Jun 8—Department of SD Marine Corps League State Convention—American Legion Post 8—Pierre—10:00 am (CT)
Jun 12—Sioux Falls Vet Center 40th Anniversary Open House—3:00 pm—5:00 pm (CT) - 3200 W. 49th Street
Jun 13-16—VFW State Convention—Dakota State University—Madison
Jun 15—SFVAHCS Whole Health Class—Sioux Falls Vet Center (3200 W. 49th Street) - 9:00 am—11:00 am (CT)
Jun 15—Tribute to Freedom—Honoring our Veterans—Eureka Sports Complex—10:30 am (CT)
Jun 20—VABHHCS Veterans Orientation Program (Building 53—Room 102) Hot Springs—4:30 pm (MT)
Jun 29—Veterans for Veterans Annual Poker Run—Mitchell Depot Bar and Grill—11:00 am (CT)
Jul 17—South Dakota Veterans Council—PVA Headquarters—Sioux Falls—10:00 am (CT)
Jul 20—PVA 5th Annual Poker Run—Thirsty Duck Bar and Grill (945 S. Marion Road) - Sioux Falls—10:00 am (CT)
July 20-24—National VFW Convention—Orlando, FL
Jul 20—SFVAHCS Whole Health Class—Sioux Falls Vet Center (3200 W. 49th Street) - 9:00 am—11:00 am (CT)
Aug 2—American Legion Highway 281 Centennial Run (ND/SD Border to SD/NE Border)
Aug 3-6—DAV National Convention—Orlando, FL
Aug 17—SFVAHCS Whole Health Class—Sioux Falls Vet Center (3200 W. 49th Street) - 9:00 am—11:00 am (CT)
Aug 17-18—Sioux Falls Air Show
Aug 29—Veterans Day at the Fair
Aug 26-29—SDDVA Benefit School
Sep 21—SFVAHCS Whole Health Class—Sioux Falls Vet Center (3200 W. 49th Street) - 9:00 am—11:00 am (CT)
Sep 21—Davison County Veterans Wellness and Benefit Fair—Mitchell Corn Palace—8:00 am—4:30 pm (CT)
Sep 21-22—SD American Legion Golf Tournament—Hartford Golf Course

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